



Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein
In Honor of Asian Pacific Heritage Month

May 26, 2006

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today entered the following statement in honor of Asian Pacific Heritage Month into the Congressional Record:

“Mr. President, I rise today in recognition of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. It is a time to recognize the immeasurable contributions in service, commerce, and cultural diversity made by Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander descent who continue to strengthen our great nation’s character and influence.

I believe that the United States draws its strength from a proud history of immigration.

The Asian Pacific American community is an essential part of that tradition – and it boasts an extremely vibrant and diverse population.

Places like Chinatown, Korea Town, Little Tokyo, Little Saigon, and Filipino Town only enhance the richness of the American urban landscape.

Today, more than 14 million Asian Pacific Americans live in the United States.

I am proud to come from the State that has the highest population of Asian Pacific Americans – nearly 5 million!

In particular, Los Angeles County is home to the country’s single largest Asian community, with 1.4 million individuals.

California owes a great deal to the tradition of Asian Pacific Americans who have made their home in the Golden State since the 1800s.

To help honor that legacy, last year, Congress authorized the Angel Island Immigration Station Restoration and Preservation Act. Known as the “Ellis Island of the West,” over one million immigrants, including 175,000 Chinese immigrants, passed

through its gateways to establish new lives on the West Coast. Now, this location can continue to provide us with a vital link to our nation's history and culture.

Let me take a moment to pay tribute to the visionaries who helped to create the Asian Pacific Heritage Month:

- Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta;
- United States Senator Daniel Inouye;
- Former Senate Spark Masunaga; and
- Former Congressman Frank Horton.

Thanks to the leadership of these fine individuals, a joint resolution established Asian Pacific American Heritage Week in 1978, initially designating the first 10 days of May as the annual time of recognition. That was later expanded to a month-long celebration in 1992.

The Month of May holds special significance for the Asian Pacific American community. It coincides with two important milestones:

- The arrival in the United States of the first Japanese immigrants on May 7, 1843; and
- The completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869 – thanks in large part to the contributions of thousands of Chinese workers.

This year, the theme chosen to represent this year's Heritage Month is "Dreams and Challenges of Asian Pacific Americans." It is designed to recognize the struggle of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who continue to stand firm against adversity in the pursuit of the American Dream.

Sadly, the Asian Pacific American community understands all too well this struggle.

Their story has been entangled with several dark chapters of America's history.

It began in the 1800s, when people of Asian Pacific ancestry were prohibited from owning property, voting, testifying in court, or attending school.

This story of persecution regrettably continued throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries:

- The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese to the United States;
- A 1913 California law, which prohibited immigrant aliens from owning land;
- The repatriation of Filipino immigrants in 1935; and
- The mandatory internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. This particular story remains a blight on the conscience of this great nation.

Nevertheless, the Asian Pacific American community found a way to endure and persevere over these injustices and indignities.

In so doing, they to create a tradition of triumph over adversity that personifies the best of this nation's character.

But our nation cannot afford to overlook their sacrifice and struggle.

For this reason, I am proud that in the 109th Congress, Tule Lake – the largest internment camp of the ten that existed – was designated as a National Historic Landmark. This will help future generations acknowledge and understand the painful legacy of the Japanese Americans who endured the shame of the forced internment camps used during the bleak days of World War II.

I would also like to take a moment to commend the 300,000 Asian Pacific American veterans who established the practice of military service for the thousands of Asian Pacific American men and women currently serving in our Armed Forces.

One such individual is my distinguished colleague, United States Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii.

Even though his loyalties to our nation – and that of many other Japanese Americans – were falsely and wrongly questioned during World War II, Senator Inouye proudly participated in our nation's most highly decorated unit, the Army's 442nd "Go for Broke" regiment combat team.

Since then, Senator Inouye has continued to serve this country as a devoted public servant and exemplary citizen.

His story of boldness and aspiration is not unique.

Throughout the decades, countless numbers of Asian Pacific Americans have worked tirelessly to build better lives for themselves and their families.

But although many Asian Americans have achieved success, we cannot forget the hardships of the Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander communities that were forced out of their homelands and who are now struggling to prosper here in America.

According to the 2000 Census, Southeast Asian Americans have the lowest percentage of education, with most possessing less than a high school education. They also have the lowest proficiency of English and one of the highest rates of receiving public assistance.

We cannot allow these individuals to be ignored or overlooked. I will do everything I can to help this community prosper.

In closing, as we reflect on many individual stories of achievement and success during this Month of May, we are steadily inspired by the standards Asian Pacific Americans set in our schools, in the business world, and our neighborhoods. I am confident that their dynamic initiative and entrepreneurship will only continue to inspire us to greatness in the years to come.

Thank you.”

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